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THE CONTRASTING WORLD-CONCEPTIONS OF EAST AND WEST.

Lecture by Dr. RUDOLF STEINER, delivered at D o r n a c h , on
the 17th of June 1922. *)

To-day I feel called upon to explain to you a few anthroposophical facts closely connected with the human being.

We are, to begin with, connected with the world through our senses; we are connected with it - and this is clearly evident - from the moment of waking up to the moment of falling asleep. We perceive the various spheres of life through our senses, and a certain soul-activity within us constructs a picture of the world from these perceptions. I only allude to this, in order to draw attention to the way in which we can study our waking life and all that it concerns.

Yet we do not only live in the world during our waking condition, but also when we are asleep. During our sleep, we live outside our body with our Ego and our soul, in an environment which is, at first, unknown to the ordinary human consciousness.

All that I am telling you now, applies to the present-day human being; that is, to man and the way in which he has developed his soul-life from the time which I have often indicated as an extraordinarily significant moment in the evolution of humanity - from the 15th century onwards. Yet we must ask ourselves: How are we connected with a world which is closed to our ordinary consciousness? How are we connected with it, when we are asleep? When we ask this question, we immediately encounter an obstacle, particularly in the present moment of human evolution, unless we bear in mind the development of humanity, and the fact that its soul-life has passed through many stages

If we reflect upon the soul-life of modern man, we find that the human being belonging to our so-called civilised world must make the greatest effort to form his ideas and concepts. Nowadays we frequently look back into earlier epochs of human development without any clear thoughts. At that time there was no educational system

*) From stenographic notes unrevised by the lecturer.

of the kind required to-day, and we look back without really thinking about it into that ancient culture which developed and flourished in the East, when it was not necessary for man to have the education through childhood upwards, that he has to-day.

In Europe it is almost impossible at this time to imagine how differently the men of earlier epochs regarded education in the Orient. In those times, ~~such~~ powerful Eastern teachings were created, which uplifted heart and spirit, such as the Vedas and all that is contained in the wisdom of the East. To-day all that arises through the spirit is judged in accordance with the way in which we have been educated and taught from childhood upwards, and the way in which we have developed through our education, and what we have learned through our life in the external world. At first, it seems obvious to our ordinary way of thinking that we must be educated, for we must learn to form our thoughts on life. If we were unable to do so, we should be helpless in the present-day world. I might say, that at the present time, we have not yet progressed very far in the art of forming thoughts. One of the aims of education should be that of more and more perfecting in us by our own effort this art of forming thoughts about the things in the world.

This was prepared for in the Greek epoch. The Grecian life was to a certain extent completely under the influence of the Orient, and consequently the education there aimed only at a very elementary development of the thinking forces. Oriental influences streamed into Greek cultural life, and these did not encourage thought-efforts, they did not induce man to form ideas himself on the objects around him, if I may express this trivially.

In the spiritual life of the West, we now admire Socrates, and rightly so, as one of the first who stimulated man to form thoughts about surrounding objects. Yet it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that there was no thought-life in the Orient, simply because in Europe man had to develop a thought-life through his own effort. The Orientals had a powerful life of thought, which we find all the more powerful, the further we go back into the cultural life of the East.

A rich spiritual life existed in the East, even before the time of the Vedas and of the Vedanta philosophy. As I have frequently explained, the Vedas and the Vedanta philosophy are not the first stages of spiritual life of the East, for these first stages were never recorded in writing. During the last two or three thousand years before Christ, this powerful Oriental life had already reached a decadent stage. What the Oriental now admires, is but the last remnant of this ancient spiritual life.

This life of thought was not like ours, which makes us (please forgive the materialistic expression, which is only used as a comparison) grow hot inwardly and perspire in our efforts to bring it into being. The Oriental life of thought was an inspired one.

For the Oriental, the thoughts ordered themselves, as if of their own accord. He obtained his world-picture in the form of an inspiration. He always had the feeling: "My thoughts are given to me", and he did not know the inner soul-effort which we must make in order to construct our thoughts. From the moment of waking up to the moment of falling asleep, he felt that his thoughts were gifts bestowed upon him. His whole soul-life had a corresponding nuance. When he nurtured thoughts, he felt grateful to the gods who gave him these thoughts. When he was able to say: "Thoughts live in me, who am a human being", he felt in these thoughts the instreaming of divine-spiritual powers. Thus it was quite a different way of thinking.

For this reason, the Oriental life of thoughts of remoter epochs was not so severed from the life of feeling and from the life of the heart, as it is to-day, for the normal human consciousness. Just because man could feel that thoughts were given to him, he felt uplifted as a human being, and a religious feeling was connected with every one of his thoughts. Man felt that he must meet the divine powers who gave him his thoughts with a kind of religious piety, and he experienced these thoughts more as a united whole, than as single thoughts.

But what was the objective external cause of this? It was caused by the fact that in these ancient times man's sleep was different from ours. When we are asleep now, we are forsaken especially in the head by the Ego and the soul. The metabolic organs and the extremities do not become separated so completely from the human being. Even when we are asleep, our soul and our Ego still penetrate into the extremities of the body and into its metabolic organs. We should not think that during sleep the Ego and the soul forsake our whole being, but instead we should picture to ourselves that the head is the most forsaken part.

I have often explained this, and now I would like to put it before you schematically. In the waking human being, the Ego and the soul permeate the physical and the etheric body. Now it would be wrong to draw the sleeping man so as to indicate here the physical and etheric bodies lying on the bed, and the Ego and the astral body just there, beside them. Instead; they should be so drawn that if the physical organs and the extremities, including the arms, which are also extremities, are indicated here, then the Ego and the soul which are outside the human being would have to be drawn outside it only in the vicinity of the head. Strictly speaking, when we are asleep, the Ego and the soul are outside the physical and the etheric body only as far as the head is concerned.

If we now return to those remoter times to which I have alluded, we find that when the human being was asleep, the organs of the head - that is, principally the nervous-sensory system and a part of the respiration which permeates the head - were the field of action used by the divine-spiritual beings connected with the earth.

If we refer quite seriously to realities, it can indeed be said, without speaking metaphorically, that in the most remote epochs of human evolution the divine-spiritual beings on earth withdrew from the human being when he was awake. But when he was asleep they took up their abode in his head. The human Ego and the human soul abandoned the head: and there, the divine-spiritual beings directed their activities. When the human being woke up in the morning, he once more dived into his head, and there he found the results of all that had taken place under the influence of the deeds of the divine-spiritual beings.

These beings ordered man's nervous processes in accordance with their laws, and they exercised an influence even upon the circulation of the blood and penetrated into the organic processes in the etheric body and in the physical body. Yet this was not clearly realised; only those men who were schooled in the Mysteries had an insight into such things. The great majority of men did not realise this, yet they could EXPERIENCE it.

On waking up, the human being thus found in his head the deeds of gods. And when he then lived through his waking life and was able to perceive the structure of his thoughts, this was due to the fact that the gods had been active in his head while he was asleep. The ancient Oriental thus discovered within him every morning the heritage of the gods, the results of what they had done in him while he was asleep. He perceived this in thoughts, in the form of an inspiration. The divine-spiritual beings did not inspire him directly, when he was awake. They inspired him when he was asleep, while they were active in his head.

In those ancient times, everything that led to man behaving socially in this or in that way, was really inspiration. It might be said: At that time, the divine-spiritual beings still had the possibility of ordering earthly affairs in such a way that while human beings were asleep, they arranged the trust men felt in one another, and they brought about the obedience of the large masses to their leaders, etc. etc. In that ancient Oriental epoch there was still cooperation between the divine-spiritual world and the earthly world. But this was only possible, because the whole human organisation was different from the present one

I have often mentioned that now people imagine that every thing connected with man as he is to-day has always been the same; that the physical part of his physical organism, the psychic part of his soul, the spiritual element of his Ego, were then as they are now. When a modern historian writes about ancient Egypt and unriddles its documents, he believes that the Egyptians may not have been as clever as he is, but that essentially speaking, they had the same thoughts, feelings and impulses which we have to-day.

One generally thinks that if we go far back into time, man was a kind of higher ape, and that from this stage he passed on

to a condition which they only imagine! And when the time began which interests them from the historical standpoint, then they have to admit that man was more or less what he is to-day, with the thoughts, feelings and impulses which he now possesses.

Yet it is not so. Even in the course of history, man underwent considerable changes. You only have to remember how the Greek viewed the world, quite physically. The Greek did not see the colour blue, as we see it now! He only saw the reddish tones of colour. If a modern man contemplates the beautiful blue sky and thinks that the Greek, who was steeped in beauty, must have loved it, he is mistaken. The Greek saw the warm, reddish and yellow tints, and could not distinguish green from blue. He therefore saw the sky quite differently from the way in which we see it, with our normal consciousness. Even the eyes have changed completely in the course of human evolution, although this only applies to the more intimate and finer traits. The whole sense-organisation has changed in the course of history. During those ancient Oriental times of which I have spoken, the organisation of the senses did not prevent man from surrendering to that which came from his organism when he was awake, as the result of what remained to him from the activity of the gods in his body, while he was asleep.

Gradually, man's sense-organs changed; his senses connected him with the external world in so living a way, that when he awoke, this connection prevented him from noticing what might still remain in him as a heritage from the gods, left there while he was asleep.

Even if the gods were still to be active in his head during sleep (they are no longer active in it, for man's organisation has changed, and this would no longer have a meaning for the development of mankind) man's progress and further development would not profit by it. On the contrary, he would not be able to perceive this heritage which comes to him from his sleep, because on waking, his fully developed senses immediately attract him strongly to the external world. What remains from his sleep, would therefore pass over into his body, instead of being taken up by his consciousness. To-day man would not be able to experience himself through the inspiration of the gods in his sleep, and were they still to use his head-organisation as a field for their activities. These inspirations would retreat into his body and prematurely age his organism.

In older times, man's sleep-experiences could be assimilated during his waking condition, because his senses were not directed so strongly towards the external world as they are to-day, and man could at that time live in union with the world of the gods.

This existence was a real LIFE in union with the world of the gods. The gods cannot be perceived through the senses, and in ancient times, man had to rely on being able to experience at least

the deeds of the gods. He could do this, because his senses were not yet so strongly turned towards the external world as to-day.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

GUIDING LINES BY RUDOLF STEINER

From a Lecture dated January 30th, 1924.

In future, it will therefore not be possible to come along and to say : "We are doing things which do not concern the Vorstand". These things can of course be done, but in that case one cannot be a member of the Classes. Indeed in our School it will be necessary that this principle of holding together even in regard to our mentality is considered just as essential as it has always been in the Mysteries; for otherwise the whole essence and being of our anthroposophical life remains something that cannot reach its goal, inspite of everything. These are simply fundamental requirements, fundamental laws.

Of course, someone can say: "I shall destroy Anthroposophy." He is free to do so, if he likes. But we cannot pretend that ~~xxx~~ those who ~~wish~~ ~~xx~~ lead anthroposophical affairs ~~that~~ ~~they~~ can allow the non-fulfilment of the required conditions, which are essential for the existence of Anthroposophy.

Whether it is a question of founding a Group, or anything else, the essential point to be borne in mind is that everything should really be done by the Class-members of the Independent University for Spiritual Science ("Freie Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft") in unison with the leadership, so that the guidance of anthroposophical affairs is really centralised in this leadership.
